

KANSAS CITY AS A CENTER OF EARLY ORNITHOLOGICAL
ACTIVITY IN THE WEST*

BY MYRON H. SWENK

In western North Dakota the Missouri River, flowing eastward, changes its direction to the southeast, and, after maintaining a general southeasterly flow for several hundred miles, across that state and South Dakota, and between the states of Nebraska and Iowa, it again turns sharply to the east, to continue its course for some three hundred miles more across the state of Missouri to its junction with the Mississippi River, a short distance above St. Louis. The Kansas River, traversing the greater part of the state of Kansas from west to east, joins the Missouri River where it makes this sharp eastward turn, and the cities of Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, are located at this point, on the south side of the Missouri River and on the east and west sides, respectively, of the Kansas River. It is at this interesting spot that we find ourselves today.

It is not easy for one to comprehend that the first settlements that were destined to develop into this busy western metropolis of three hundred thousand souls had their first beginnings only a little over a century ago, but such is the case. By virtue of its geographical position, the present Kansas City region was in the direct line of white migration to the great Northwest wilderness of the first half of the nineteenth century, and, both by river and by wagon trail, the pioneer settlers of the great Missouri Valley passed through this region. So it came about that the early ornithologists who penetrated into this region, in company with men primarily interested in projects of commercial exchange or military exploration, and who brought back with them upon their return our first knowledge of the birds of the Northwest, so well summarized by Elliott Coues in his book of that title that appeared in 1874, were all more or less identified for a time with the Kansas City region.

When, in 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was consummated, President Thomas Jefferson planned to have this newly acquired territory explored. Accordingly, on May 14, 1804, the famous Lewis and Clark Expedition started by boat up the Missouri River from its mouth, progressing by rowing and towing. By June 25, they had reached the mouth of a large creek called Blue-Water, now known as Big Blue River, which flows through the eastern portions of this city. They

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camped for that night on an island in the Missouri River near the mouth of this creek. By the night of June 26 they had reached the point where the Kansas River joins the Missouri, and remained there for two days. On their return down the river, in 1806, they reached this same point again on September 15. Both in ascending and descending the river, they commented upon the abundance of the Wild Turkey in this region.

In the year 1811 two parties ascended the Missouri River, both of which have at least a passing interest for us. John Bradbury, the English botanist, was in 1809 commissioned by the Botanical Society at Liverpool to make researches on the plant life of United States. He reached St. Louis on the last day of December of that year, and when, on March 12, 1811, a party under Wilson Price Hunt started to ascend the Missouri by boat, not only Bradbury, but the American botanist, Thomas Nuttall, then a young man of twenty-five, accompanied the party. They spent April 8 and 9 at Fort Osage (now Sibley), a short distance down the Missouri River from Kansas City, and also in Jackson County, Missouri. About three weeks after the Hunt party had started, that is on April 2, 1811, another party, under the fur-trader Manual Lisa, also started up the Missouri River with the design of overtaking the Hunt party. With Lisa's party was Henry M. Breckenridge, an American traveller and jurist residing at St. Louis. These men, though not ornithologists, have left us some graphic accounts of the Passenger Pigeon, and tell of the nesting of the Canada Goose in this region at that time. They returned down the Missouri River in July, 1811, in the boats of Manual Lisa, reaching Fort Osage on the 27th of that month.

The first competent ornithologist, however, to visit this region, was a man made thus competent by a friendship with no less person than the pioneer American ornithologist Alexander Wilson himself, namely Thomas Say, who was chief zoologist on the Major Stephen H. Long Expedition that was sent out in 1819 to explore the Platte River and the region beyond. This expedition, which started at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on May 5, 1819, in the steamboat "Western Engineer", proceeded down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, and thence up the Missouri River. This was the first steamboat to ascend the Missouri River. Say and others left the main party at Fort Osage (Sibley) on August 6, 1819, and proceeded across this county (Jackson) to the Kansas River, and thence northwestward along the south side of the Missouri to a point near to the mouth of the Platte River, where they rejoined the main party on September 15.

Say made some notes on the bird life in this region, noting especially the Raven here for the first time on his trip, and commenting on the Lark Sparrow, which he had met for the first time at Bellefontaine, four miles above the mouth of the Missouri, and which he formally described in 1823.

In 1833 the German ornithologist, Maximilian, Prince von Wied, made his memorable journey up the Missouri River. He left St. Louis on April 10, 1833, on the second trip of the steamer "Yellowstone" up the Missouri, returning in the spring of 1834. His account of this journey, which was published in Coblenz, Germany, in two volumes, the first in 1839 and the second in 1841, teems with references to the bird life observed all along the Missouri River, from its mouth to the terminus of his ascent, at Fort Mandan, North Dakota, and naturally includes references to the bird life of the Kansas City region.

In 1813, seven of the men who had been part of the Wilson Price Hunt party that had left St. Louis on March 12, 1811, to ascend the Missouri River to Fort Pierre (South Dakota), and thence travel overland through the Black Hills and Big Horn Mountains to found Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River, returned down the North Platte and Platte River Valleys, seven years before the Platte Valley was again traversed by the Major Long expedition. Seventeen years later, in the spring of 1830, a party under Milton Sublette left Independence, just to the east of Kansas City, which was then the outpost of white civilization, to trade for furs in the Northwest country. They followed the path that shortly after was to form the historic Oregon Trail, and, reaching the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming in the middle of July, they returned the same summer by the same route bringing their ten wagons well laden with furs.

Two years later, Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth and Milton Sublette led a party that followed the same trail, not only to Wyoming but through the South Pass in the Rocky Mountains and on to Oregon, thus blazing the Oregon Trail in its entirety. In 1834, Captain Wyeth led a second party over this trail, and this time two ornithologists were included in it, Thomas Nuttall and the twenty-five year old Philadelphian John K. Townsend. Captain Wyeth had left St. Louis on March 7, 1834, and was joined by Nuttall and Townsend at Booneville, Missouri. The caravan left Independence on April 28, 1834, and shortly after their start the Harris's Sparrow was first discovered by Nuttall, probably somewhere within the present city limits of Kansas City. The same bird was also discovered by Maximilian near Bellevue,

above Omaha, Nebraska, fifteen days later (on May 13) on his return trip down the Missouri.

In 1842 the first expedition to the Rocky Mountains under Captain J. C. Fremont, left St. Louis on May 22, proceeding up the Missouri River to near the mouth of the Kansas River, where the expedition completed outfitting and started on June 10, following the Oregon Trail. In 1843 Captain Fremont's second expedition left Kansas City on May 29 and proceeded up the valley of the Kansas River. Unfortunately, there was no ornithologist with either of the Fremont expeditions, and they added very little to our knowledge of the bird life of this region.

But in the latter year, 1843, the famous ornithologist John J. Audubon ascended the Missouri River to Fort Union, and his journal of this Missouri River trip was published in 1897. With Audubon were his patron Edward Harris and the taxidermist J. G. Bell. They passed the Kansas City region on May 2, 1843, reaching Fort Leavenworth the next day, and returned by this region about the middle of October of the same year. Near Fort Leavenworth on May 4 Harris also discovered the sparrow which bears his name, and a little farther up the river the party discovered another characteristic Missouri Valley bird, the Bell's Vireo. Concerning the Kansas City region Audubon refers to the presence of such now extirpated species as the Wild Turkey, the Ruffed Grouse, and the Carolina Paroquet, and also mentions nesting Bald Eagles.

In 1846 Lieutenant J. W. Abert led a military party from Fort Leavenworth over the Santa Fe trail, passing through what is now Kansas City, and in 1882 published a list of the species he had observed between Fort Leavenworth and Santa Fe.

During the 50's we find several ornithologists, of a somewhat later generation than that to which Say, Nuttall, Townsend, Maximilian, and Audubon belonged, continuing the activity in this region. In 1854, P. R. Hoy collected numerous birds in the vicinity of Kansas City, among which was a specimen of the Purple Sandpiper, a bird that has not since been recorded from here. Lieutenant Couch in this year also forwarded to Professor S. F. Baird at Washington specimens from this region for use in his great work in 1858. In 1856, F. V. Hayden accompanied the first Lieutenant G. K. Warren expedition, which started from St. Louis up the Missouri River for Fort Pierre on April 16, with Dr. Hayden collecting specimens near Fort Leavenworth on April 21 and elsewhere along the way, whenever opportunity afforded. In the same year the United States War Department sent an expedition

under Lieutenant F. T. Bryan to survey a route for a wagon road from Fort Riley, Kansas, to Bridger's Pass, Wyoming, and this expedition was accompanied by Mr. Wm. S. Wood of Philadelphia, who made large collections of birds, not only in the vicinity of Fort Riley, from June 13 to 20, but along the route through Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado, until late in October of that year. The following year Mr. Wood again collected birds around St. Louis from May 6 to 15 and around Fort Riley until the departure of the party, about June 12, these being supplemented by further collecting in Nebraska and Wyoming until early September of 1857. But yet more important, from the local standpoint, were the collections of Dr. J. G. Cooper, who in 1857 collected birds at Independence, Missouri, and vicinity, from May 26 to July 1, at Shawnee Mission, Kansas, on July 3 and 4, and at Fort Leavenworth on July 12 and 13, as a member of the W. M. Magraw party.

During the 70's ornithologists working in this region included the late Dr. J. A. Allen, who during the first ten days of May, 1871, collected birds at Fort Leavenworth and vicinity, and W. E. D. Scott who observed and collected birds in the adjacent county to this one, Johnson County, in the spring of 1874. With the appearance of Coues' "Birds of the Northwest", in 1874, the pioneer period in Missouri River ornithology may be fittingly considered as having been brought to a close.

We assemble today, therefore, on grounds that were not unfamiliar to many of the great ornithologists of the nineteenth century, and it is fitting that we should realize this fact as we meet to carry forward the standard of ornithological progress that they have dropped.

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IN SEARCH OF NEW COLONIES OF KIRTLAND WARBLERS

BY NORMAN A. WOOD

Early in the morning of June 12, 1925, the writer in company with Mr. Walter Hastings, Custodian of Oology in the Museum of Zoology, started from Ann Arbor for north central Michigan in an automobile loaded with tents, air mattress, blankets and three cameras. The object of the trip was to find nests of Kirtland Warblers (*Dendroica kirtlandi*) in order to study and photograph the birds at home.

Our first stop was in Clare County, where we hoped to locate the colonies found by the late Dr. W. B. Barrows. We drove for an entire day but found no Kirtland Warblers. We were told that large tracts